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SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/ELA AND DRL/IRF

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [SOCI](#) [PHUM](#) [KIRF](#) [EG](#)

SUBJECT: EGYPTIAN JEHOVAH'S WITNESS ACTIVIST DESCRIBES GOE PERSECUTION

REF: R. KENNA-LE CLAIRE E-MAIL 10/31/2005 AND PREVIOUS

Classified by ECPO Minister Counselor Michael H. Corbin for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (C) Summary: A senior member of Egypt's small community of Jehovah's Witnesses (JW) said that the GOE's persecution of the group is intensifying. He linked the persecution to the strident opposition to the group's beliefs by Coptic Pope Shenouda III. End summary.

2. (C) Raymond Girguis (protect) is a retired civil servant who worked for the GOE's Ministry of Insurance and Social Affairs. Born into the Coptic Orthodox faith, he joined the Jehovah's Witness community in 1964 after meeting with a JW activist. Girguis estimates that the JW community in Egypt numbers approximately 1000, most of whom have their roots in Egypt's Coptic Orthodox community. According to Girguis, shortly after he joined the JW community, during the GOE crackdown on various suspected disloyal groups by Nasser in the aftermath of the 1967 defeat, GOE persecution of the JW community increased, extending to a formal ban on the use of existing "Kingdom Halls." Since the 1967 uptick in persecution, said Girguis, the members of the community have been limited to holding small meetings, "secretly and underground," without any singing (which he said is an essential part of their worship), because they fear it would attract unwanted attention. (Note: JW members practice active evangelism, preach the imminent approach of the millenium, and are strongly opposed to war and the authority of organized government in matters of conscience. End note.)

3. (C) According to Girguis, the Coptic Orthodox Church under the leadership of Pope Shenouda III is the "main barrier" to securing a safe and legal existence for the JW community in Egypt. Girguis said that the Pope has repeatedly attacked the JW community as heretical, zionist, anti-Muslim, and immoral. (Note: In a series of articles that have been running since July in Al-Watany, the weekly Cairo paper aimed at the Coptic Orthodox community, Pope Shenouda has strongly criticized the JW belief system, denouncing it as a heresy. In addition to his strongly held views on the JW community, Pope Shenouda is also highly critical of other heterodox Christian groups, including Adventists and Mormons. In addition, he has expressed strong opposition to homosexuality and abortion, and he is also known to be critical of Zionism. End note.) Girguis also asserted that his group had previously applied to the Ministry of Insurance and Social Affairs, after securing Interior Ministry approval, for legal recognition, but had been unsuccessful due to "a ruling from Al-Azhar that we are against Islam."

4. (C) Girguis asserted that GOE harassment of the JW community has worsened in recent months. He said that while the GOE's State Security Investigations Sector has always kept tabs on the community, the SSIS officers in touch with the JW members have recently begun to suggest that JW theology is anti-Muslim. Girguis also said that "about a month ago," a JW associate, Atef Fikry from Shoubra Al-Khaima, just outside Cairo, was detained and "beaten" by SSIS officers who sought to recruit him to serve as an SSIS informant. According to Girguis, Fikry was released after five days. Girguis also asserted that SSIS officers also recently detained a Canadian JW visitor to Egypt when he sought to depart from Cairo. Although SSIS did not harm the Canadian, they confiscated his printed and electronic materials on the JW beliefs. (Comment: We have not been able to corroborate the details of Girguis's charges of SSIS persecution. The sensitivities surrounding such allegations of religiously-motivated persecution make it difficult to gather reliable information on the topic. End comment.)

5. (C) Poloff advised Girguis that the Embassy stands ready to assist in arranging meetings for JW advocates from the U.S. and Europe who are planning to visit Cairo shortly to raise the question of religious freedom for the JW community with the GOE (ref). Poloff also asked if Girguis thought that low-key USG attention to the JW issue with appropriate GOE interlocutors in Cairo would be helpful. Girguis said that it would.

